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AUTHOR Carspecken, Phil F.; Cordeiro, Paula A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a year-long ethnographic study of successful Hispanic high school students. Twenty Hispanic high school seniors, 10 male and 10 female, were repeatedly observed and interviewed in school, home, and other settings. In this article the ways in which these students constructed their social identities is carefully examined. These successful students employed three modes of discourse about their Hispanic identities. When talking about their routine activities of achieving at school (discourses of "doing") these students affirmed an Hispanic identity and contrasted it to "White" identity. When talking about their futures (discourses of "becoming") these students distanced themselves dramatically from the term "Hispanic." When talking about their ethnicity directly (discourses of "being") these students problematicized the term "Hispanic" and attempted to reduce it from any real content. A communicative-action model of the self is developed in the beginning of the paper which is subsequently used to analyze and compare these three discourses. One table, one figure. (Contains 15 references.) (Author)

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BEING, DOING AND BECOMING:

The Identities of Successful Hispanic Students

Phil F. Carspecken
University of Houston

Paula A. Cordeiro
University of Connecticut

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The Identities of Successful Hispanic Students

ABSTRACT:

This paper is based on a year long ethnographic study of successful Hispanic high school students. Twenty Hispanic high school seniors were repeatedly observed and interviewed in school, home, and other settings. Ten were male and ten were female. In this article the ways in which these students constructed their social identities is carefully examined. These successful students employed three modes of discourse about their Hispanic identities. When talking about their routine activities of achieving at school (discourses of "doing") these students affirmed an Hispanic identity and contrasted it to "White" identity. When talking about their futures (discourses of "becoming") these students distanced themselves, dramatically, from the term "Hispanic". When talking about their ethnicity directly (discourses of "being") these students problematized the term "Hispanic" and attempted to reduce it of any real content. A communicative-action model of the self is developed in the beginning of the paper which is subsequently used to analyze and compare these three discourses.

Most Hispanics born into low income families within the United States fail to reach high levels of educational achievement (CPEC 1980, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1971-1974, McCann and Austin 1988). Yet a minority of such students actually excel. In this article we investigate the ways in which twenty highly successful

Hispanic students, all born into low income families with few role models for educational success, construct their social identities. We describe the particular ways in which these students conjoined "being Hispanic" with "being an achiever" in their daily interactions and internal reflections.

Our interest is guided by both empirical and theoretical concerns. Empirically, our findings are directly relevant to the specifics of *Hispanic* mobility and indirectly consequential to educational policy aimed at curbing the high dropout rate typical of this population. Theoretically, we develop a communicative-action model of the self which avoids the pitfalls of two prevalent models of social identity which have been employed to explain the conditions of minorities in American society. On the one hand, our model rejects the view of a single, unified, self which in the case of minorities must either betray its origins to "become White" or affirm its origins and reject opportunities for achievement, or negotiate between these two extremes at all times and in all settings (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). On the other hand, our theoretical model avoids too radical a view of "split" or "contradictory" selves as presented by some post-structuralist theories of subjectivity (e.g. Shapiro, 1990 ch. 1). Our twenty achieving Hispanics made reference to their ethnicity through three distinctive *modes of discourse* displaying both continuities and discontinuities across them. The social self emerges as a set of implicit references carried by various modes of routine social activity which display *degrees* of unity and discontinuity between themselves.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Selection of Participants

The research design employed for this study, which was conducted during the 1989/90 school year, was ethnographic. Twenty Hispanic students were chosen, each of whom had Mexican ancestry, lived in low-income households, had parents without a high school education (or its equivalent in Mexico), and were high school seniors enrolled in either an honors or magnet program, both of which were selective in their admissions. Ten were male, and ten were female. Ages ranged from 16 to 18. Most of these students were born in the United States. Our twenty subjects were selected from the class rolls of two inner-city high schools within a large metropolitan area of the southwestern United States.

Data Collection

Over a period of one academic year (1989/90), each student was repeatedly observed in classrooms, corridors, school cafeterias, and out-of-school settings. Each student was also frequently engaged in conversations with the ethnographer on various social sites -- the home, school, and various restaurants. Such conversations were conducted in both one-on-one and group settings, and were usually tape-recorded. This article is based primarily on the interview data as our interest here is more in the ways these students spoke of themselves than in their daily routines and modes of social interaction (see Cordeiro 1990 for a fuller account of the ethnographic findings). However, the comments our subjects provided in interviews and discussions were often related to the ways they actually behaved in the naturalistic settings observed,

and all interview material used in our analysis has been found to be consistent with observations of these students in other settings.

A MODEL OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Social Action and Implicit References

The model of social identity we use in this analysis is based partially on Habermas's (1982, 1987) communicative theory of action and partially on the "text metaphor" of society (Brown 1987). It also extends Carspecken's (1991: Ch. 5, 1992) work on binary identity oppositions conceived through pragmatic models of meaning, and it is consistent with Giddens' theory of structuration (1979).

The most important feature of our model is the concept of "reference". A social act always carries several levels of meaning through its implicit reference to cultural norms, beliefs, values, and assumptions. An actor (1st person) will expect her act to be understood when she assumes that the people addressed by the act (2nd person), and the people she is conscious of observing the act (3rd person), share a set of norms, beliefs, values, and assumptions with her. Thus the meaning of an act depends upon *intersubjectivity* -- shared norms, beliefs, values and assumptions which are referenced by the act (Carspecken and Apple 1992).

Normative Texts: Pragmatics and Semantics

Social acts carry *levels* of intersubjective reference because immediate references to norms, assumptions, beliefs and values will implicate less immediate modes of intersubjectivity. To make this point clear, let us consider a statement made by one of the subjects of this study, "Pilar". Pilar said in interview that she

tells people she is "Hispanic" but never tells them that she is "Chicana" (full quotation provided in a later section). For analytical purposes, let us imagine a non-Hispanic classmate of Pilar's saying something like: "Well, you are Chicana, aren't you?" and Pilar coming back with: "No! I'm NOT Chicana, I'm *Hispanic* but I'm not *Chicana*".

The meaning of this speech act operates on both pragmatic and semantic levels. Pragmatically, Pilar makes use of various assumptions which provide an *infrastructure* (McCarthy 1982) for her speech act. Intersubjective norms tacitly under negotiation between the two classmates structure their interaction as one between friends, allow Pilar's use of certain tones of voice, facial expressions, and body movements to convey degrees of emphasis and confidence, allow for inferences with respect to Pilar's degree of sincerity and the extent to which her statement is expected to be taken seriously, indicate certain subtle assumptions about Hispanic identity which are not captured in her semantic formulations, and so on.

Semantically, Pilar is using words to reference a pre-understanding of "Hispanic" and "Chicana" which she assumes to be held by her classmate. She references this pre-understanding in order to challenge it. Her semantics reference what we could call a "pragmatic identity set" -- an implicit and complex set of possible modes of activity, each such mode contrasted with the others, and each such mode tacitly understood as an identity: a way of claiming to be a certain *type* of person distinguished from other possible *types*. The semantics of her statement, in other words,

reference certain components of routinely established pragmatic infrastructures through which Pilar and other "Hispanics" interact with others.

An example from hermeneutics might be helpful in clarifying the concept of "pragmatic identity set". In Gadamer's (1975) example, modes of activity semantically identified as "bravery" or "cowardice" are understood on tacit-pragmatic levels before they are referenced with terms like "bravery". A person may "act brave" through an unlimited number of specific, innovative, activities. A pre-understanding of "bravery", assumed to be shared between the actor and her audience, is referenced by a "brave" act. The act itself *clarifies* what bravery is -- *interprets* the pre-understanding pragmatically. In addition, this tacit, pragmatic, understanding of bravery takes its shape through a distinction between it and a contrasting mode of activity: "cowardice". Cowardice is equally tacit and pragmatic -- a pre-understanding which would be clarified by *acts* of cowardice. The two modes of activity must be understood *together* on pragmatic levels in order to exhibit and clarify either meaning in activity. Together, the two terms constitute a *pragmatic text*. If either term is *talked about* this pragmatic text is "mapped" onto an available semantic field with its own textual relations. But this process of mapping is likely to be incomplete and may introduce distortions (Carspecken 1992).

Identities are similarly understood on pragmatic, textual, levels. They are types of pragmatic texts. When Pilar uses the *words* "Hispanic" and "Chicana", she is "mapping" a pre-understood

pragmatic identity set onto an available *semantic field* (a vocabulary set) and simultaneously referencing an available *discourse* (pre-understood contexts and uses of this semantic field). Though much is left out by such mapping activities, and though much can be distorted, the main point for our purposes is that the semantics of identity depend upon references to tacit pragmatic texts.

The pre-understanding of "Hispanic" and "Chicana" referenced semantically by Pilar is one which conjoins the two terms through implicit contrasts to other pragmatically understood identities. If her statement were to be challenged or queried, (e.g. "What is the difference between 'Hispanic' and 'Chicana'"), Pilar would have to map other pre-understood pragmatic distinctions onto semantic fields. She may articulate purely normative terms like "mannered" and "unmannered", or objectively referenced terms like "White and "Brown", or subjectively referenced terms like "aspiring" and "lazy". In any case, a challenge to the semantic content of her statement would require further acts of mapping pragmatic texts onto semantic texts, of specifying terms which take their sense through contrasts to other terms.

An identity set is thus one kind of text -- a "normative text" because it directly references modes of activity tacitly understood as unities: *identities*. An identity may therefore be treated analytically in much the same way as Gadamer treats the concepts of "bravery" and "cowardice". Because semantic mappings of identity sets work through further references to pragmatic texts (recall our examples above: "Hispanic--Chicana" will implicate pragmatic sets

mapped as "mannered--unmannered", "dignified"-- "undignified", and so on), there are always *levels* or *layers* of reference involved in social action. When Pilar "acts Hispanic" she references a distinction between "Hispanic--Chicana" which itself implicates a distinction between something like "dignified--undignified" which itself references something like "good person--bad person" and so on indefinitely.

Pragmatic Texts vs Pragmatic Contexts

The discussion above has laid the foundations for a communicative-action model of identity. Identities are first of all routine intersubjective references, features of habitually negotiated pragmatic infrastructures. Such references are characteristic of the hermeneutic process through which people reach understandings when they interact with each other. Pre-understandings of "types of person" are *interpreted* pragmatically through social acts. The pre-understandings depend upon pragmatic texts: upon pre-understandings of a set of possible modes of "being a person", each of which takes its sense through contrasts with other modes in the set. An identity is a textualized mode of behavior subject to constant pragmatic interpretation. When identities are "talked about" they become mapped onto semantic fields within pre-understood discourses, which reference pragmatic texts. The process of semantic mapping always implicates layers and levels of textual reference -- making certain elements of a pragmatic text foregrounds by giving them names, but doing so only by implicating new backgrounds, pragmatic horizons, which remain tacitly grasped pre-understandings.

The fact that layers and levels of pragmatic texts are referenced in both discursive and non-discursive action makes a distinction between pragmatic texts and pragmatic contexts appropriate. What we shall mean by "pragmatic text" is the most immediate, most foregrounded, set of contrasts in a reference and what we shall mean by "pragmatic context" is the set of more remotely referenced distinctions implicated by the foreground. To clarify this distinction, let us briefly return to Pilar's insistence that she is "Hispanic" but not "Chicana".

Pilar's assertion that she is "Hispanic" but not "Chicana" brings a pragmatic identity set into a foreground position by naming two of its elements and emphasizing a distinction between them. The distinction emphasized is conveyed in a variety of ways. First of all, she makes use of an available vocabulary and references common uses of the terms "Hispanic" and "Chicana". This is the semantic field available to her. She depends upon her classmate's pre-understanding of various *discourses* on Latin-American ethnicity. Secondly, these discourses are understood to include both negative connotations and positive, or at least non-negative, connotations. The *connotations* have to do with pre-understood pragmatic texts: ways of acting out different *types* of person. Her assertion acknowledges both the negative and non-negative connotations carried by prevalent discourses on Latin-Americans but assigns the negative connotations to the word "Chicana" and the rest to "Hispanic". Perhaps she also *adds* to the positive connotations in the case of the term "Hispanic" by making her assertion with evidence of pride, but more interaction would

have to have been noted to determine this. At any rate, the foreground of her references involve common uses of the terms "Hispanic" and "Chicana" plus certain connotations which depend upon pragmatic pre-understandings of "positive" and "negative" modes of being a person. Her assertion does not challenge the pre-understandings of "positive" and "negative", only the ways in which these are assigned to the semantics of "Hispanic" and "Chicana".

This foreground, or most immediate reference, of Pilar's assertion, then, is to a pragmatic identity set which is commonly referenced in human interactions where Hispanic ethnicity must be acknowledged in some way. This most immediate reference is what we are calling the "pragmatic text". Pilar, however, has clearly brought the "Hispanic--Chicana" distinction into foreground position only by referencing a background of pre-understood "positive" and "negative" modes of being a person. These are less immediately referenced by Pilar because she does not problematize them, but rather assumes a shared understanding with respect to them. For implicated background texts like this, we shall use the term "pragmatic context". Pragmatic contexts will recede indefinitely as explained already. "Negative" and "positive" modes of being a person are distinguished from each other only through pre-understandings of certain criteria -- say, values like "working hard" vs "being lazy".

We are now ready to examine the modes of identity referenced by our twenty successful Hispanic students during a variety of conversations and interviews.

IDENTITIES OF BEING, DOING, AND BECOMING

Our analysis is broken down into three main categories, each of which references a different intersubjective configuration characterized by a distinctive core binary opposition. We will present an overview of each category in this section and then flesh each category out in sections to follow.

The first category is constructed from our analysis of the kinds of talk provided by our students when considering their *being in general*. That is, our analysis here is of the modes of speaking used when our subjects reflected upon what it means, generally, to "be" Hispanic. The identity references involved in such talk are to non-setting specific features of social identity: to the *abstract* category of "Hispanic", as they perceived it to be used in dominant discourses, and to the *abstract* category of self, the non-setting specific features of their being. The temporal context of this usage of the term "Hispanic" is the extended present because the category of "Hispanic" entered this type of talk as a universal term, abstracted from all specific settings and not related to processes of change.

The core binary opposition implicated in talk about "being" Hispanic was found to reside in a pragmatic *context* distinguishing real identity from apparent identity. The talk of our subjects on this matter, in other words, continually distinguished between what their "real" being is and how their being appears to others.

The second category is based on ways of speaking about *general modes of doing* -- about their identities as constructed through consistent regimes of activity. "Achieving" was an especially

important category here. "Hispanic" was used in speech of this sort against a different textual and contextual horizon. The temporal context involved a contrast between the present and the future. "Doing" was extremely goal-oriented, future-oriented, for these students. The semantics of "being Hispanic", when discussing present educational activities, were re-articulated through a text (and context) which conjoined dominant discourses employing the term Hispanic with dominant discourses employing terms like "achievement", "ability", "success", and implicated implicit theories about the nature of the good life.

The dominant contextual binary opposition for this category turned out to be Hispanic vs White. In contrast to the first category of talk, our subjects affirmed their Hispanic identities unambiguously when speaking of their achievements and, furthermore, made it clear that it was their Hispanic identity, conceived in opposition to White identity, which gave these achievements meaning.

Our third category is constructed through the analysis of the talking our subjects engaged in about *becoming*. This sort of talk occurred when the students discussed their hopes for the future. The temporal context for this type of talk emphasized a distinction between the past and the future. Once again, use of the term "Hispanic" appeared within yet a third normative text. The text and context in this case employed contrasts between the cultural past and the personal future.

The fundamental contextual opposition referenced in talk about becoming was one between solidarity and competitive individualism.

The majority of our students described their process of becoming as a movement *away* from a cultural past which they described as "Hispanic" in this type of talk. The past was presented in terms of Hispanic cultural generalities which they had rejected, the future in terms of personal attainments defined in opposition to this past. However, a solidarity ethic structured the talk of many of these students who considered themselves "role models" for other Hispanics, and this ethic played a more dominant role in the talk of a few students who conceived of their future in terms of legal / political activism directed towards the improvement of conditions for Hispanics generally.

IDENTITIES OF BEING: "A JALAPENO IN A CANDY JAR"

When talking about "being Hispanic", all of our subjects indicated a perception of negative connotations which "Hispanic" carries in dominant discourse:

> When people call me Hispanic or Mexican I feel they mean it in a negative way....I remember in elementary school when my parents told me I was Mexican-American. I was shocked. Why does everyone say I'm Mexican? .... A wetback was a Hispanic or Mexican. So I was called 'wetback'. (Raul)

For Raul, as for most of these students, first encounters with "being Hispanic" were contextually framed through tacit understandings of minority--majority cultural groupings. "Hispanic" was a term originating from a dominant group which excluded those to which it was applied. It was a negative term, a label. The feat of acknowledging one's (unchangeable) being as "Hispanic" when early exposures to this term emphasized its

negative connotations had to be accomplished mainly through a sort of *internal* talking oriented towards an abstract audience. This is because dignity requirements dictated a change in the normative texts and contexts surrounding the typical uses of "Hispanic" in dominant discourses. It required a certain amount of *critical reflection* upon these normative realms which was not possible to articulate in many real life contexts of talk and interaction. Of course, it was possible to articulate such reflections in interviews with an ethnographer, but these interviews were hardly typical interactive settings for these students. In addition, some of these students employed discourse of this type in their writings -- once again oriented to an abstract audience (see below).

Thus the modes of speech elicited in interviews about being Hispanic reflected the inner accommodations made by these students. These accommodations worked by locating "Hispanic" within a text distinguishing real from apparent identity. Real identity was separated off from the term "Hispanic" by allowing only the most mundane, objectively referenced, features of the term to hold any validity: having ancestors from Mexico, eating certain kinds of food, "only", "nothing more than that". Angela's comments are representative: "I don't really know what being Hispanic means. I guess it means being born here with relatives from Mexico -- nothing more than that".

The context surrounding this text was shaped about implicitly grasped social oppositions between dominant and subordinate cultures. "Apparent identity" implicated a theory of social

domination and cultural imposition. "Hispanic" was a term used by a dominant group to exclude others: it was a *label*.

With the term relegated to that of an external imposition, vague and devoid of substantial meaning, these students were able to employ a variety of secondary strategies. One was to actually not consider one's self Hispanic at times:

> In my art classes, a lot of people thought I was White, so one day I busted out and spoke Spanish... 'Oh you're Mexican?' they said. And I said, 'Well no, but yeah'. (Eduardo)

Another secondary strategy was to refer to a variety of ethnic labels and differentiate between them in order to divest at least one term from the negative connotations carried by dominant discourses and locate these connotations elsewhere. This strategy was, in other words, one of reconstituting the identity set textualizing "Hispanic". "Real vs apparent" structured a text distinguishing "Hispanic" from "Chicana", "cholo", "vago", and so on. Pilar's use of this tactic has already been described but let us quote her here in full:

> I'm Hispanic....It means my heritage. I should be proud of it. But sometimes you see, a Hispanic; like statistics show that they're no good and this and that. And you know it's kinda hard because as far as papers are concerned, you fill out "Hispanic", minority. The word "Chicano" is looked at as a negative term. I never use it. "Chicano" is like, oh yeah, them vagos. You know. The cholos.

> That's not me. I go, 'no, I'm not a Chicana. I'm Hispanic or a Mexican-American, but I'm not a Chicana.' (Pilar)

Yet another secondary strategy was to indicate many distinctions based on *degrees* of Hispanicity, arguing that "real" Hispanics still have accents, whereas "lesser-Hispanics" were born in the United States, had families in which there had been a variety of inter-cultural marriages, and so on. Employing this strategy exploited the possibilities of semantic ambiguity. On the one hand, pointing out a complex and indefinable range of Hispanicity problematized the term in order to reduce it of real meaning. On the other hand, it allowed some of our students to leave the negative connotations of "Hispanic" intact while separating their "real" identities from these connotations through the implicated metaphor of the continuum. "There's so many racial mixes in my family. It's not just considered Mexican. My great uncles are married to Puerto Ricans. Some of my uncles are married to Mexicans. Some are married to American people. .... Some of the kids are real Hispanic, like Blanca and Pilar, others are like me" (Natalia).

A poem written by Pilar indicates some of the social-political tensions which implicitly underlie the strategies taken by most of these students when reflecting on *being* Hispanic. The reader will recall that the category of "apparent identity" was foregrounded against an implicit horizon of tacitly understood social oppositions. This poem, an excellent example of an articulation oriented towards an abstract audience, approaches something like a

critique of U.S.--Mexican, and White--Hispanic, relations. Unfortunately, space does not allow us to quote the poem in full:

In the Middle of Two Roads

Here. I am standing
in the middle of
two different countries appearing
to be two complete and opposite worlds,
with only a line separating them both.

I look to my left
I see siblings struggling for survival.
The pequenos in poverty living on sidewalks
like perros callejeros
with only newspapers
To warm their helpless shivering bodies.
ASI ES MEXICO

I turn and view my right.
I see a lighted, prosperous Estados Unidos
where youngsters are kings in rule.
They don't worry about from where
their next meal will come.

Here, where I stand
I feel the traffic behind me .
Mexicanos going back home.
In the next lane is a different world, not so crowded.

I see drunken Americanos
returning to their "Home Sweet Home." (....)

Yo en medio de todos ESTO!
WHAT AM I? WHO AM I?
Soy MEXICANA...or am I CHICANA?
My confusion is an abyss with an infinite path. (....)

Why do I have to be the only exception?
like a jalapeno in a candy jar
...La Chicana...

What has Mexico done for me?
It gives me relief from the American lifestyle.
What about America?
I can't distinguish, other than
The key to my future...Education. (....)

Alongside her partially articulated social critique, Pilar also indicates an acceptance of dominant U.S. values -- materialistic values which took up a prominent position within the pragmatic horizons implicated by her terms "future" and "education". This acceptance of "White" values will be discussed in the next two sections. It occurs in the poem because the poem references not only Pilar's identity as *being* also suggests her accommodations with identities of *doing* and *becoming*.

IDENTITIES OF DOING: "EVEN AN HISPANIC CAN BE A DONALD TRUMP"

Interview questions which probed the "being" identity of our students' ethnicity resulted in the distancing strategies described above, textualized by a real-identity vs an apparent-identity opposition and the more remotely implicated context of social domination. It was oriented towards an abstract audience extending beyond the interviewer -- an audience which would be motivated primarily to *understand*; rather like Habermas's concept of the "ideal speech situation" (McCarthy 1982).

Interview questions which sought for the relationship of identity specifically to achievement, however, elicited talk in which the Hispanic identity was *affirmed* rather than distanced and problematized. When talking of their achievements, these students embraced an Hispanic identity and contrasted it with a White one. This was due to our students' belief that educational excellence can prove the Mexican-American stereotype wrong. The audience extending beyond the interviewer was in this case "White". Blanca's comments are very typical:

> ...what I've accomplished and everything, I feel proud to say, yeah, I'm Hispanic, because I feel like, hey, we can do it too. .... And just to say, yeah, an Hispanic did it! (Blanca)

"Hispanic" in this case appears against a normative text contrasting the term with "White". It is the normative *context*, however, rather than the text, which truly differentiates this category of talk from *being* talk. The more immediate layers of the context here lack any implications of social *domination* in a strong

sense. The negative connotations ascribed to "Hispanic" are presented here against an implicit contextual cluster of terms congruent to dominant conceptions of "success". Blanca and the others could embrace an Hispanic identity within this type of talk because they made use of "White" conceptions of achievement and personal worth. Thus the textual distinction between Hispanic and White was generated as a mode of cultural misunderstanding. The students could affirm the Hispanic side of this opposition when speaking of their modes of doing because these modes were "successful" in White terms, disproving the misunderstanding. These students frequently articulated, very directly, the pragmatic horizon of "success" as "White":

> To see a bunch of little cultures in one big city is just weird. Supposedly a lot of White people are poor and stuff, but those are people you don't look at. You look at somebody that's higher up. It's always like the White guy. (Julia)

Thus achieving is doing just as well as "Whites" do. But "White" here was not so much a term abstracted from real-life contacts with White people but rather from media-driven images of White success. "White" was contrasted to "Hispanic" within a context affirmative of the materialistic values propagated by the media and advertising industries of the U.S.A.

... to prove to people that it doesn't really matter whether you're being Hispanic or not, you know. Just because half the people drop out of high school, Hispanics or Mexican-Americans, it doesn't mean

we can't succeed if we want to. .... Even an Hispanic can be a Donald Trump. (Rafael)

The point emerging again and again from the interviews was that being Hispanic does not prevent one from being as successful as Whites -- that the term "Hispanic" is accordingly mis-used in dominant discourses. This required an acknowledgement of being Hispanic alongside a denial of its negative connotations. The denial, however, was to be *performed*, not argued for, and the performance had to meet White cultural terms.

The textual distinction between Hispanic and White, however, was to be preserved, not annihilated, by such performances. The trick was to affirm and maintain the opposition, but succeed in White terms at the same time. The point was *not* to *become* White.

> When you go to Astro World and you're in a crowd of a lot of Caucasian girls and Caucasian guys, 17, 18 years old, they've got their Ford Mustang GT. They've got their Eclipses and all this stuff. They're dressed up super good, the best clothes. Here come the Mexicans: corduroy cut-offs, All-Star Converse Chuck Taylors, socks rolled up to here. They wear muscle shirts, tattoos. They look awful.....But Mexican-Americans have a lot of heritage. Everything's real bright colors, flowers, los toreros, los rancheros. I'm definitely proud of whom I am . I've never wanted to be Caucasian....The only part probably that I would like to be Caucasian is because they have higher incomes....that's the only part that I would like. (Manuel)

The importance of the distinction we are making between talk about "Hispanic *being*", and talk about *doing* -- achieving -- is that the former kinds of talk used a distinction between "real" and "apparent" identity in order to diminish any real meaning in the term "Hispanic". This was a reflective kind of talk oriented towards an abstract audience and it nearly always brought forth a pragmatic context in which modes of social domination were implied -- a social critique on the verge of articulation. Some articulations of this background context, articulations like that of Pilar's poem, came very close to actually critiquing hedonism and materialism: the "White" conception of success.

By contrast, the latter kind of talk, talk about achieving and succeeding, did the opposite. It *emphasized* the category of being Hispanic, embraced and maintained its distinction from White, and gave meaning to the act of achieving through perceptions of White success. The pragmatic context implicated here lacked any covert models of social oppression. A surface level of cultural oppression was referenced, but in the form of modes of misunderstanding which individual effort could dispel. Instead of an implicit model of society as made up of groups enmeshed within unequal power relations, we have an implicit model of society as a ladder which all are free to climb. The audience implicated here was "White". Achieving was a performance for *show* -- showing Whites that they have wrongly stereotyped Hispanics.

<u>IDENTITY AS BECOMING:</u> CULTURAL PAST VS PERSONAL FUTURE

Talk about *doing* was temporally framed through a contrast between the extended now (in which regular modes of activity take

place) and the future (which will be characterized by good school marks and eventually high incomes). The identities referenced in this mode of talking were *present* identities conceived of rather like the developing bud which will one day flower forth.

Interview questions more explicitly directed towards the nature of these students' futures, however, elicited yet a third discourse constructed about Hispanicity. The temporal frame referenced by this type of talk contrasted a cultural past with a personal future. The identities involved here were *present* in the sense of *becoming* -- not the 'bud' which will flower forth, but the transparent stream described only in terms of its origin and its destination.

Our twenty students used the term "Hispanic" in this type of talk in a distinctive way. Hispanic was textualized through a contrast between past cultural origins and personal future. "Hispanic" appeared on the pragmatic horizon of a cultural past and was conceived in *distinction* from the pragmatic horizon of a personal future. "Hispanic" was used unambiguously, but it was neither embraced nor affirmed in our student's identity claims. Rather the opposite:

> [I don't want to be] the typical Hispanic that doesn't have an education, 10 kids running around the house, stuff like that. (Manuel)

In this type of talk "Hispanic" was tied to stereotypes typical of dominant discourse. Hispanics were people who had a lot of children, who walked about barefoot, who were pregnant. Rafael explained that his father had often told him stories, when he was

younger, about how difficult life was in Mexico. Continuing his reflections on this he added: "I want to get way from home...I want a different lifestyle". And Blanca remarked:

> I want my own career....I can't imagine myself barefoot and pregnant....I mean I imagine myself with my little briefcase, my hair all pinned up and real classy .... I see myself among professional people. No matter what it takes. (Blanca)

The desired personal future depended on adopting what we've presented in the section above as "White" values in opposition to "typical Hispanic" or, at times, "other-Hispanic" values. The successful Hispanic student must have "big dreams" of the future which embraced "White" definitions of success: "[The Hispanics who drop out of school] don't have big dreams, like having a lot of money" (Julia).

The textual structure in all these examples contrasts a cultural past with a personal future. The pragmatic context tacitly employed a contrast between solidarity and competitive-individualism. The movement of *becoming* was a movement *away* from a past defined in cultural-group terms towards a future defined in personal-individual and, not infrequently, competitive terms: "[remarks of older Hispanics] just make me want to go to college even more....I can make them jealous and motivated to try to motivate their children" (Rafael).

The solidarity--individualism opposition contextualized comments about becoming in rather complex ways, however. Most of these students did not wish to sever their futures totally from

solidarity with their cultural origins. Various strategies for maintaining some form of solidarity with individualistic conceptions of the process of becoming were apparent from the interview material. Rafael's statement, quoted in the paragraph just above, contrasted older-generation Hispanics and younger-generation Hispanics and allowed him to claim solidarity with the latter group. Basically, solidarity for him meant being a "role model" for individual success -- breaking the trail for other young Hispanics to follow. This was not an uncommon strategy. Blanca remarked: "I'm trying to set an example and I'd like to consider myself as a role model", and Manuel:

> [I want to be] a role model for some people. .... if someone else, my little brother, or cousins, they see me and they think 'Well, Manuel, he's just a backyard guy and he did that!'.

Yet affirming solidarity through claims to being a role model implicated the competitive-individualistic side of the opposition more heavily than the solidarity side. "Being a role model" is in this case being distinct and standing out, affirming an identity in opposition to "more typical" Hispanics. And this identity was itself contextualized through the Hispanic--White opposition discussed in the section above. Being a role model was like taking the position "White" was in when these students discussed achievement and success, a way of placing other Hispanics in the "Hispanic" position. Solidarity was, however, more heavily referenced by a few of these subjects who articulated their

conceptions of the future with positive references to the Hispanic ethnicity:

> I want a better community in general....I watch the news. I see what's going on with Hispanics....These Hispanic organizations don't do enough, they don't get involved enough....I want to be a Hispanic lawyer...make things better in the community for Hispanics. (Antonio)

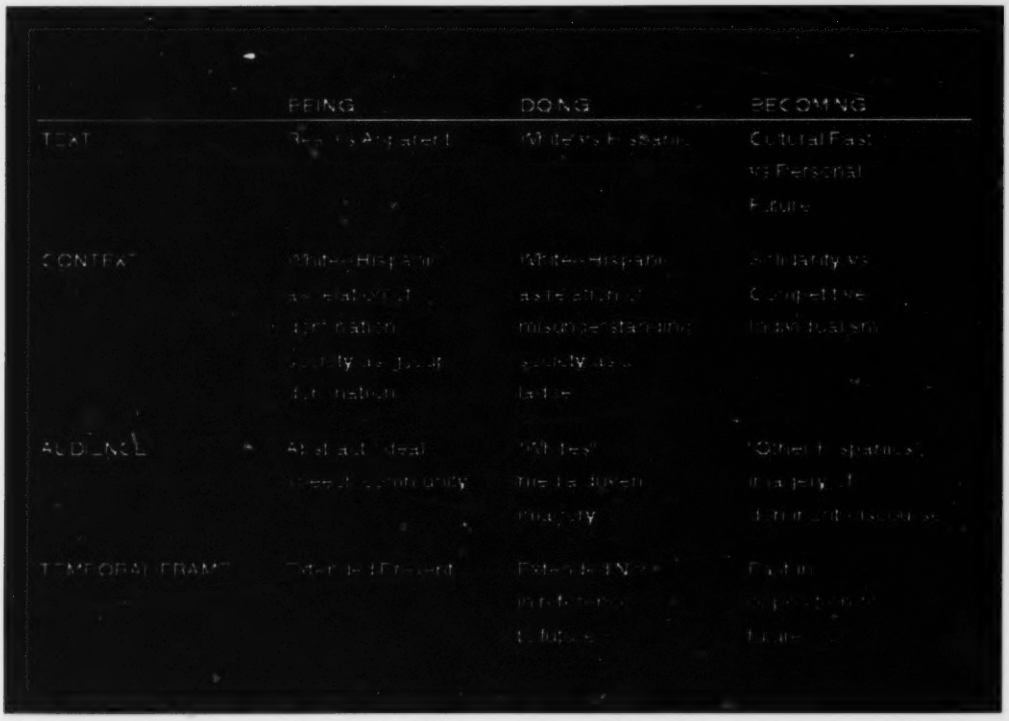
CONCLUSIONS

Figure one summarizes the above discussion. The three modes of talking about Hispanic ethnicity are both continuous and discontinuous with each other.

Talk about identity as implicated by *doing*, by achieving, implied an audience of idealized "Whites" who perceive these students as "Hispanics". Their statements about their achievements consistently made reference to "Whites" as the ones they wished to prove wrong. Accordingly, they embraced their Hispanic label and stressed their successes, which were defined in "White" terms. Their activities referenced textual shifts between "White" and "Hispanic" but did so only by retaining a contextual frame affirmative of media-driven, materialistic, images of success. In this way, these twenty students could affirm an Hispanic identity while also affirming views of life they explicitly labelled as "White".

Talk about identity as implicated by *becoming*, on the other hand, implied an audience of fellow Hispanics who did not achieve, who, "did nothing", who were frequently "barefoot and pregnant",

FIGURE ONE: *Texts and Contexts of Discourse with their Temporal Dimensions and Audiences*



who had "lots of kids", and who were poor. Becoming meant moving away from them -- distancing one's self from the "typical" Hispanic identity.

Finally, talk about identity as a form of *being* implied an abstract audience -- something like Habermas's "ideal speech situation" in which all participants are motivated solely to reach an understanding. This mode of talking was the way in which these students would acknowledge their Hispanic identity in the face of negative connotations of the term carried by the dominant culture. They did not routinely engage in talk of this nature but thought of themselves through this mode and, for some, wrote poems and stories through it. It is therefore not coincidental that this mode

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expressed the social and cultural contradictions of being an Hispanic most explicitly and indicated a "real" identity unified above these contradictions through its articulation and grasp of them. It is not coincidental that this mode of talk about being Hispanic came closest to a social critique.

This study displays the complexities of minority achievement. In the case of these twenty Hispanic students, at least, achievement is not simply a process of "becoming White". These twenty students constructed diverse modes and layers of identity which possess both continuities and discontinuities with each other. Overall, undoubtedly, these twenty students basically adopted the dominant White ethos and strove to move away from their cultural origins. But this process retained a large residue of implicit tensions which these students were able to partially articulate in abstract talk about their "being". The communicative action model of identity developed in this paper, a model which makes use of the contrast between pragmatic infrastructures, semantic fields, and modes of discourse, is a good framework for capturing the subtleties and complexities of the process.

NOTES [The one and only footnote should go here -- it is on the title page and mentions the authors' names and thus can not be included on this review copy.]

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	BEING	DOING	BECOMING
TEXT	Real vs Apparent	White vs Hispanic	Cultural Past vs Personal Future
CONTEXT	White--Hispanic as relation of domination: society as group domination	White--Hispanic as relation of misunderstanding: society as a ladder	Solidarity vs Competitive Individualism
AUDIENCE	Abstract: ideal speech community	"Whites": media driven imagery	"Other Hispanics", imagery of dominant discourse
TEMPORAL FRAME	Extended Present	Extended Now in reference to future	Past in opposition to future